

Wyoming leaders pitch coal power to California

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Wyoming political leaders and California's top electrical utilities regulator expressed hope that the two states could work together on using Wyoming coal to help meet California's growing power demands.

Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal and the leaders of the state House and Senate flew to Los Angeles on Friday to meet with members of the California Public Utilities Commission and the executives of two major utilities.

"We had a very positive conversation discussing the various interests and needs of the two states," Michael Peevey, president of the California Public Utilities Commission, said Monday.

Wyoming is the nation's top coal-producing state. The delegation sought assurances that California would use electricity from power plants fueled by Wyoming coal, provided that those plants meet California's carbon dioxide emissions standards.

"The bottom line is, if Wyoming electricity met California environmental standards, they would probably accept our electricity," said state Rep. Tom Lubnau, R-Gillette, who went on the trip along with Freudenthal, House Speaker Roy Cohee, and Senate President John Schiffer.

California lawmakers have approved strict standards for emissions of carbon dioxide, a gas blamed for contributing to global warming. Similar regulations have caused utilities to pull plans for dozens of coal-fired power plants nationwide.

"The cleaner fuels that come to California, the better it is for the seller," Peevey said.

The Wyoming delegation brought with it draft legislation for encouraging the underground storage of carbon dioxide emitted from Wyoming power plants. Schiffer, a rancher, said they hoped to show commitment to trying to meet California's emissions laws.

"If my buyers say they want black-hided cattle, what I do is I go buy black Angus bulls and they'll buy it. In Wyoming, we are selling energy, and if they want it a certain way, we need to be responsive to that," Schiffer said.

Rob Hurless, Freudenthal's adviser on energy issues, compared the delegation's meeting with Peevey, Southern California Edison CEO Al Fohrer and San Diego Gas and Electric CEO Debra Reed to visiting another country's energy minister.

"I wouldn't classify it as any sort of breakthrough," Hurless said. "But I would say it's a discussion that is an important discussion, and that's why we did it the way we did and took the people we did."